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SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE

Pastoral Letter Regarding the Ahmaud Arbery Decision

Dear Southeast Conference UCC,

On Wednesday, we witnessed a landmark court decision in the Glynn County, GA Superior Court. The jury assigned to the trial of three men, Travis McMichael, Greg McMichael, and William “Roddie” Bryan, for the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old black man who the white defendants chased down, detained, and killed as he ran in the neighborhood where they lived, delivered the verdicts after 11 hours of deliberation. Travis McMichael was found guilty on all counts. and Travis father, Greg McMichael, and Roddie Bryan were found guilty on most counts. All three defendants were found guilty of murdering Ahmaud Arbery. Arbery’s family and friends spoke up in satisfaction and shed tears of relief for the verdict, even as they continued to mourn the senseless death of their loved one. Cries for justice reverberated outside the courthouse as supporters chanted Arbery’s name.

What does this verdict mean? One social media post by Massachusetts Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley said it very well:

Ahmaud Arbery was hunted down for simply jogging while Black. This verdict isn’t justice—justice would be Ahmaud alive today. This verdict answers our calls for accountability, but our work for a more just legal system continues.

The racially motivated murder of Ahmaud Arbery and the legal system’s first response to his death were an injustice. This verdict does not erase those

injustices, nor does it fix them. This verdict, which holds the perpetrators accountable for detaining and killing a person because of the color of his skin may be a start. But we, people of faith, followers of Christ, the Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ, have much yet to do to move from occasional, sporadic accountability to a Just World for All.

As we move into the anticipatory Season of Advent, we invite you to join us in reflecting on the numerous hate crimes and murders of People of Color by white people and their outcomes in our history, both recent and distant. What do they mean for us? As we await the next pieces of accountability in Ahmaud Arbery's murder, including sentencing and an upcoming federal hate crime trial of the three men who killed him, we invite you to contemplate what God is calling you to do to change the current realities of injustice and hatred. And, as reflection and contemplation cries out for justice and healing, we ask you to discern with us what actions we will take together in ministry in the Southeast Conference to bring about change that is crucial.

We continue to hold in prayer Ahmaud Arbery's family—may they find strands of healing and hope in the days to come to revive their aching hearts. May they experience God's love in our prayers and in the support of those who cry out for justice on Ahmaud's behalf. And as we both acknowledge the blessings we experience and the discriminatory horrors of our history and our present, may God guide us with mercy and wisdom toward a future that is both more just and more whole.

Empowered by God's grace and love.

Rev. Kimberly Wood

Conference Minister, SECUCC

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Associate Conference Minister, SECUCC

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